

HEALTH DENTISTRY

BY PROFESSOR ANDREW EDER

SUMMERTIME, AND the livin' is easy," sang Ella Fitzgerald. The sunny days (if English weather permits) and increased hours of light certainly make most of us happy, as does the prospect of escaping the rat race, either at home or away.

That down-time offers the ideal opportunity to take a breath, consider how you are faring and make a conscious decision to take better care of yourself. For different people that will mean different things but perhaps one area that might need a little more TLC is your oral health.

As we live longer and keep our teeth longer, a growing problem is tooth wear, as our teeth can become short, more sensitive, sharp and chip at the edges.

The good news is that there are some simple lifestyle changes that can easily be incorporated into your day to help you to protect your teeth.

1. CARRY A STRAW

Many drinks are acidic, including fizzy drinks, fruit juices, smoothies and alcohol, which can damage the outer surfaces of the teeth. Drinking them

Six ways to give teeth a holiday

through a wide-bore straw directs liquid to the back of the mouth and avoids swishing drinks around the mouth. To keep with the times and be environmentally friendly, it is best to use a paper or reusable straw, rather than one made of plastic.

2. CHEW GUM

The act of chewing sugar-free, xylitol- or sorbitol-sweetened gum after eating or drinking helps stimulate

saliva flow. Saliva neutralises any acid in your mouth, which has a two-fold beneficial effect over the long term – it will minimise the possibility of the teeth being worn away and tooth decaying in their weakened state. If you are not a fan of chewing gum, eating a piece of cheese achieves a similar outcome.

3. BRUSH IN THE RIGHT WAY AT THE RIGHT TIME

Never brush immediately after acidic exposure; instead wait at least an hour. If it is bedtime, use a fluoridated

mouthwash and apply a paste containing high fluoride or calcium phosphate to the teeth, without rinsing afterwards. When you can brush, use a fluoridated toothpaste low in abrasivity and a soft toothbrush, which will gently remove plaque that might otherwise cause gum disease and/or tooth decay.

4. SNACK SENSIBLY

It is best to consume acidic foods and drinks (including fruits, salad dressings, pickles, soft drinks and alcohol – all popular summer fare – at meal-

times, to minimise their potential for damage to the teeth.

So, if you fancy a snack in between, tooth-friendly choices include cheese, carrots, celery, boiled eggs, hummus and pitta. For more smart snacking options, there is plenty of advice on the web.

5. RELAX

There is a type of tooth wear that involves contact between the teeth over and above normal use, as seen in patients who generally grind and clench their teeth at night, and this has been linked to a stressful lifestyle.

You might think relaxing is more easily said than done but making a few easy lifestyle changes can be a great help, for example doing something relaxing before bed, such as yoga, reading or having a bath.

6. VISIT YOUR DENTIST IF IN ANY DOUBT

If you have any concerns about tooth wear or would like preventive advice, see toothwear.co.uk, contact the London Tooth Wear Centre, or see your dentist or hygienist.

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